MANCHESTER 1824
The University of Manchester

Martin Harris Centre
for Music and Drama
Cosmo Rodewald Concert Hall

Quatuor Danel – Weinberg Cycle

Marc Danel – Violin
Gilles Millet – Violin
Vlad Bogdanas – Viola
Yovan Markovitch – Cello

Thursday 21 March, 13:10

Thursday 21 March, 19:30

Friday 22 March, 13:00

Friday 22 March, 19:30

Saturday 23 March, 13:00

Saturday 23 March, 19:30

Sunday 24 March, 13:00

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Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-1996): a humanist composer in fraught times

Weinberg was born in Warsaw, and his early musical activities were as pianist and ensemble leader at the Jewish theatre where his father was composer and violinist. From the age of 12 he took piano lessons at the Warsaw Conservatoire, and in later life his fluency as a sight-reader and score-reader was much vaunted. Among his several fine recordings as pianist in later years is that of his own Piano Quintet, together with the legendary Borodin Quartet.

In 1939 he fled the German occupation to Belorussia, where a border guard reportedly inscribed his documents with the stereotypically Jewish first name, Moysey. This was the name by which all official sources thereafter referred to him until the 1980s, when he officially reclaimed his Polish appellation. Meanwhile, close friends used the pet-name Metek. His parents and sister did not survive the war, and he dedicated a number of his most profound works to their memory.

In the Belorussian capital of Minsk from 1939 to 1941, Weinberg attended the composition classes of Vasily Zolotaryov, one of Rimsky-Korsakov's numerous pupils. Here he acquired a solid technical grounding. His String Quartet No. 1 had been composed in Warsaw and was the product of a prodigiously talented self-taught teenager under the influence of what he later dubbed 'post-impressionism', as represented by the doyen of Polish composers of the time, Karol Szymanowski. Its successor dates from the time of his studies with Zolotaryov in Minsk. Both works show the formation of a distinctive lyrical voice, and Weinberg felt highly enough of them to revise them in later life, in addition creating a version of No. 2 for full string orchestra, which he dubbed the first of four chamber symphonies.

Following the Nazi invasion of the USSR in June 1941, just after his graduation concert, Weinberg was evacuated to Tashkent, capital of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Uzbekistan in Central Asia. His Third Quartet (1943) was the last piece he composed there; in it his personal blend of lyricism, energy, empathy and compassion reaches its first full flowering.

Then, at the invitation of Shostakovich, who had been impressed with the score of his First Symphony, Weinberg settled in Moscow, where he lived from September 1943 until his death. It was here that he composed Quartets Nos. 4-17. He travelled outside the country only once, to visit the Warsaw Autumn Festival in 1966. Painfully for him, he was received coldly, as a Soviet citizen rather than a native Pole returning to the nest. His encounter with the moderated avant-garde techniques of post-war Polish music left some superficial impression on his own music. But by that time his commitment to the humanist tradition represented by Shostakovich was too strong for him to embrace what had become an alien style and aesthetic.

As he travelled this fraught path, Weinberg forged a triple identity as a Polish-Jewish-Soviet composer. Attempts to pin him down to only one, or indeed only two, of these three identities are futile, though it is understandable that each community of listeners and commentators would want to claim him for themselves. In fact, it is the fusion of identities that gives Weinberg his unique voice and enables him to speak so powerfully to audiences in the 21st century.

Shostakovich: Weinberg's 'flesh and blood'

There were to be many encounters with Shostakovich in Weinberg's Moscow years, including premiere performances as pianist and a famous recording of the duet version of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony alongside the composer. From the earliest days of their acquaintance, the two composers regularly demonstrated their latest pieces at the piano during meetings in each other's apartment, and Weinberg's name appears in Shostakovich's diary more often than any other. Weinberg remained in awe of his great mentor and would not have dreamt of placing himself on the same level; close though they were personally and creatively, he would not even presume to call the man 13 years his senior 'friend'. Though never one of Shostakovich's official students, Weinberg readily acknowledged the inspiration, reportedly declaring: 'I count myself as his pupil, his flesh and blood.' And Shostakovich lost no opportunity to commend Weinberg's music, in person, in public and in print. The specific impact of Weinberg's quartets on those of Shostakovich, and vice versa, was almost immediately apparent, and this 'dialogue' was sustained over decades, to the

point where Shostakovich once described it to a friend, jokingly, as a ‘quartet competition’.

External events continued to impinge on Weinberg’s life. When he was arrested, interrogated, and imprisoned in February 1953, as a consequence of family connections at the height of Stalin’s anti-semitic purges, Shostakovich took it upon himself to write to Lavrenty Beriya, the feared head of the MGB (later the KGB). He even made a pact with Weinberg’s family to adopt their daughter, in the event that her mother was also incarcerated. Thankfully Weinberg was released at the end of April, not long after the death of Stalin. The experience had a lasting effect on his health, which was never particularly robust. From wartime years he had contracted tuberculosis of the spine, giving him a slight stoop, evident from some photographs, that was one reason why he did not pursue a solo pianistic career. Later in life he suffered from, and eventually succumbed to, Crohn’s disease.

Throughout the succeeding years of the Khrushchev Thaw, Brezhnev’s ‘stagnation’, Gorbachev’s glasnost and the break-up of the Soviet Union, Weinberg declined to exploit any image of victimhood, preferring to recall with pride that his music had been championed by many of the starriest musicians and conductors in his adopted country. During his lifetime, Weinberg could count the likes of David Oistrakh, Leonid Kogan, Mstislav Rostropovich, Emil Gilels, the Borodin Quartet, and conductors Kirill Kondrashin and Vladimir Fedoseyev among champions of his works. Official recognition came in the form of honorary titles, in ascending order of prestige: ‘Honoured Artist of the Russian Republic’ in 1971, ‘People’s Artist of the Russian Republic’ in 1980, and ‘State Prize of the USSR’ in 1990.

Both Shostakovich and Weinberg worked across a wide range of genres and in a gamut of styles from folk idioms (including, especially for Weinberg, Jewish ones) to twelve-note elements. Yet for all the unmistakable echoes of his revered role-model, Weinberg retained a higher level of independence than many of his Soviet colleagues, distancing himself both from official academic conservatism and, in the 1960s and after, from the younger generation’s fervent embrace of formerly forbidden Western-style modernism. In fact, respect and influence between Shostakovich and Weinberg were mutual, and not only in the field of string quartets. Both left an imposing body of symphonies – in Weinberg’s case numbering 26. In addition, Weinberg composed six concertos, seven operas,

three ballets, five cantatas, some 30 sonatas and upwards of 200 songs. His more than 60 film scores, together with music for the theatre, radio and even circus, were a principal source of income, especially when ideological pressures from above constrained his income from commissions, performances and publication. This financial cushion also enabled him to avoid teaching or administrative posts that he did not feel by nature drawn to.

Beyond politics

Such reticence extended to a disinclination for self-promotion or publicity. For this reason, as well as his atypical Polish-Jewish background and his distance from changing musical fashions in his later years, he was never groomed as an exportable commodity by the Soviet authorities. Hence his music was scarcely promoted internationally, even in the 1960s when he was at the height of his national fame and creative powers (his String Quartets Nos. 8-12 date from this 'starry decade', as he called it). Following the death of Shostakovich in 1975, Weinberg's physical energies gradually declined. Although creatively he still worked at a rapid pace, interest among audiences, performers and critics was turning towards the avant-garde-orientated extreme of Soviet music – embodied by the likes of Alfred Schnittke, Edison Denisov and Sofiya Gubaydulina. In the West, too, their music had the cachet of greater exoticism, thanks to a mixture of technical and conceptual features that could be marketed as progressive.

The growth of Weinberg's reputation outside Russia has largely been a posthumous phenomenon. But it has been steady and exponential, and it reached new heights in 2009–2010 with celebrations in Manchester, Liverpool, Hamburg and Bregenz, since when it has never looked back. One aspect of his work, inevitably foregrounded in such retrospective celebrations, deserves to be flagged here. Weinberg's music denouncing Nazi atrocities, especially those carried out in his native Poland, is – to put it soberly – among the most powerful of its kind. It culminates in two works from the late 1960s: his first opera, Passazhirka (The Passenger) and his Requiem. Each of these was too hot for Soviet authorities to handle at the time, and they had to wait until 2006 and 2009, respectively, for their premieres – 2010 in the case of the first staging of the opera (in Bregenz, Austria). Together with a number of symphonies and other vocal works, these

ambitious works represent a direct engagement with ethical issues at the heart of what historians, following Eric Hobsbawn, call the 'short twentieth century' (i.e. 1914-1991). Yet their marginalisation in Weinberg's adopted homeland during his lifetime cannot be put down to anything remotely anti-Soviet or dissident on his part. On the contrary, their anti-fascist, internationalist humanism was, or at least should have been, entirely in accord with declared Soviet ideals. In fact, one of the most significant things about the posthumous rediscovery of Weinberg is that it helps – or should help – us to break down black-and-white categorisations of Soviet culture as a matter of conformism vs. dissidence.

In fact, Weinberg regarded the Soviet Union in general, and the Red Army in particular, as his saviour. For all his occasionally dire personal suffering at the hands of that system, there is no evidence that he lost faith in its core values or that his occasional ventures into folk-based idioms and celebratory pièces d'occasion were made in a spirit of cynicism or capitulation. This is not to say that he condoned the system in all its manifestations, still less that he actively worked on its behalf. Far from it. Unlike the majority of his composer colleagues, he never sought a teaching or administrative position. But any political views he may have held, beyond those implicit in his music, he kept strictly to himself, even when he was interviewed in the late- and post-Soviet years when he was free to speak his mind. So when Mstislav Rostropovich is quoted as referring to Weinberg's 'party affiliation', this can only be put down to the great cellist's well-known taste for mischievously exaggerated story-telling, plus a personal rift with Weinberg, the origins and details of which have not as yet been fully clarified (it may well have come down to the composer's reluctance to join Rostropovich's campaign in support of Solzhenitsyn).

Weinberg's loyalty and gratitude towards, yet also distance from, the organs of power in the Soviet Union, is one indication of the complexity of his persona. Also more complex than it might seem is the preponderance of traditional genres in his output, together with a musical language sometimes known, after Adorno, as 'moderated modernism', akin to that of Shostakovich and Benjamin Britten. The majority of his works – excepting the boldly denunciatory ones commemorating the victims of War – refuse to engage with socio-political concerns. In the West, even in his native Poland, all these features might have been viewed as tokens of conservatism. Even in the Soviet Union, some would have taken them for the same thing. In fact, however, they represent not so much an act of passive academic traditionalism as one of active cultural preservation. By his very disengagement

from the events and institutions of the outside world, Weinberg was going against the grain: indeed, against two grains. He was resisting both the careerist Socialist Realist establishment and, from the 1960s on, the clubbish mentality of the Soviet avant-garde. His output thus takes on an ethical dimension of a different kind from that of a more obviously maverick artist, but of no less enduring significance. And that dimension is given eloquent communicative force by virtue of impeccable craftsmanship.

The String Quartets: an overview

The development of Weinberg's craft and the unfolding of his ethical concerns is nowhere more clearly delineated than in the cycle of 17 string quartets that spans nearly half a century from his student days in Warsaw until close to the end of his composing career and of the Soviet Union itself. It is hard to identify clear chronological dividing-lines in this oeuvre. However, the first six quartets certainly embody a gradual expansion of horizons, culminating in the massive affirmation of the six-movement No. 6. Soon afterwards, Weinberg was brought down to earth by the so-called 'anti-formalist' campaign, in which composers were reminded of their duty to compose easily accessible music for 'the People'. The penalty for non-compliance would be loss of career, or worse. In his late twenties at the time, Weinberg was targeted as one of the most talented composers of his generation and therefore someone who should be providing a role-model. His Sixth Quartet, already hailed by fellow-composers, was far too complex and (supposedly) Western-orientated for that purpose, and it was included on the notorious list of works 'not recommended for performance', i.e. banned. It would be a decade before Weinberg returned to string quartet composition, at which point the friendly 'competition' with Shostakovich produced a fascinating creative interchange of ideas.

A second chronological gap occurred between Quartets Nos. 12 and 13, in the early 1970s. This is explicable largely by Weinberg's interest in opera, which was his main vehicle of large-scale composition at the time. In the intervening years, Shostakovich died. One way of understanding the new directions taken in Weinberg's last five quartets is that they set out to continue the paths laid out by his great friend and mentor, in part by considering the legacy of Bartók's quartets,

in part by acknowledging developments in his native Poland, but always exploring in new, unexpected, yet highly characteristic directions.

To journey through Weinberg's entire string quartet oeuvre is to experience an exciting discovery of vivid, emotionally and intellectually intense music. But it also takes us somewhere beyond. It is nothing short of a revelation of the place of concert music within the highly charged cultural and political trends of a remarkably fraught century: a bold declaration of humanist values in a hostile age.

Quatuor Danel

The Quatuor Danel was founded in 1991 and has operated in its current formation since cellist Yovan Markovitch joined the group in 2014. Their packed concert diary takes them to all major concert stages worldwide and over the past 30 years they have made a series of ground-breaking CD recordings. Their musical partners include major artists such as Leif Ove Andsnes, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, Alexander Melnikov, Adrien La Marca, Clemens Hagen and the Borodin Quartet. The group is known for their bold, focused interpretations of the string quartet cycles of Beethoven, Shostakovich and Weinberg. Their lively and fresh vision on the traditional quartet repertoire subsequently earned them rave reviews from the public and the press.

Russian composers occupy a special place in Quatuor Danel's repertoire. They championed Shostakovich's once unknown string quartets and recorded the complete cycle for Fuga Libera. Danel was the first quartet to record another great string quartet cycle of the twentieth century: Mieczysław Weinberg's 17 quartets. Their performance in Manchester and Utrecht was the first ever live interpretation of the complete Weinberg cycle worldwide. In addition to a

double cycle at the Wigmore Hall from 2023, the quartet has performed the Weinberg and Shostakovich cycles at the Philharmonie de Paris, Muziekgebouw Amsterdam, ElbPhilharmonie Hamburg, Phillips Collection Washington and in Japan and Taiwan.

Quatuor Danel is quartet in residence at the University of Manchester, Great Britain.

The quartet's latest CD release contained César Franck's string quartet and piano quintet and a Tchaikovsky edition with all three quartets and the sextet 'Souvenir de Florence'. Both CDs were released with CPO. In March 2024 the live recording of the complete Shostakovich string quartets - recorded at the Gewandhaus Leipzig - will be released by the label Accentus.

2024-2025 brings the Quatuor Danel to Leipzig again, firstly for the performance and recording of Prokofiev's string quartets, but also for the presentation of all of Shostakovich's string quartets during a large-scale commemoration for the 50th anniversary of the composer's death. The quartet tours Japan, the United States, Taiwan and South Korea and is artist in residence at London's Wigmore Hall. In Europe they can also be heard in Lisbon, Amsterdam, Kuhmo, Copenhagen, Gohrisch, Madrid and many other important stages and festivals

Thursday 21 March, 13:10

Quartet No. 1 in C minor Op. 2/141

Allegro commodo
Andante tranquillo
Allegro molto

Weinberg composed his First String Quartet in Warsaw in 1937 and dedicated it to Józef Turczyński, his piano teacher at the Conservatoire. He seems to have retained a fondness for the work, since he returned to it 48 years later and made a thorough revision, leaving the formal design and much of the harmony intact, but recasting and clarifying the texture, and allocating a new opus number. The original score is in some places almost illegible behind the various scribblings and crossings-out, which may indicate that Weinberg had been tinkering with it long before the final revision.

The work we hear today is a hybrid of youthful inspiration and mature technique. The over-heated chromaticism of each of its three movements rapidly tends towards textural saturation. In this respect its nearest relatives from the mainstream repertoire are probably Bartók's first two quartets and the two by Weinberg's compatriot, Karol Szymanowski.

The first movement is held in a state of moderate but persistent anxiety, in which the dense contrapuntal weaving of diminutions, superimpositions and polyrhythms conveys a restless attempt to escape. Structurally, however, the layout is pure sonata form, and even the traditional tonic/dominant areas of the textbook exposition are detectable behind the dense chromatic overlay.

The muted second movement, Andante tranquillo, is a dreamy, almost hallucinogenic quasi-nocturne, in song form (ABA), hovering above a tonal resolution that is never granted.

The finale at last establishes the main tonality, which was more or less veiled in the first movement. As it progresses, it develops a fascinating motoric rhythm and

unrestrained forward momentum. With its strong ethnic tinge, the finale is surely the most characteristic of the three movements, and it carries the most pre-echoes: not only of Weinberg's mature quartet style but also of Shostakovich's.

Quartet No. 2 in G, Op. 3/145

Allegro
Andante
Allegretto
Presto

Composed in Minsk between 1939 and 1940, Weinberg's Second Quartet is in a very different world from the first. Its captivating, serenade-like tone is as distant from the claustrophobic angst of its predecessor as it is from the war raging in Europe at the time. The polyrhythmic layers and chromatic congestion of the First Quartet are now greatly reduced. In their place is a transparency of texture that allows for a freer flow of ideas and a more contoured large-scale musical journey, in which troubled passages and climaxes now stand in more effective relief.

The movements also react to one another more effectively than in the First Quartet. The slow movement – now more elegiac – gives the impression of dealing with the shadows cast by the first, while the wistful, muted scherzo both takes into account the darkness of the slow movement and prepares for the Presto finale's extraversion. Meanwhile the slow movement's fast central section is beautifully dovetailed back into the reprise, and its presence enables the scherzo to take on a more restrained guise than usual, maintaining the balance of contrasting tempi across the work as a whole.

Generically the Second Quartet falls into a historical line from the elegant yet passionate neo-classicism of Tchaikovsky's Serenade or Grieg's Holberg Suite to the more anguished, even brutal, manner of Bartók's Divertimento and Honegger's Second Symphony. Given that affinities with all these string orchestral works come so readily to mind, it may be no surprise that Weinberg should have chosen to re-score the Quartet for full string orchestra as his First Chamber Symphony, Op. 145 (1987). At this point he added an entirely new third movement, quizzical and delicately balanced in tone. At the same time he took

the opportunity to retouch details of the quartet version and prepare a new score, also styled Op. 145.

It is highly likely that Weinberg would have shown this work to Shostakovich at, or soon after, their first meeting in October 1943, and that Shostakovich should have found stimulus in it when he came to compose his own Second Quartet one year later. The two works share a number of salient motifs as well as modal shifts in the harmonies that support them at crucial structural junctures. Indeed, Shostakovich seems to have remembered Weinberg's work all the way up to his Sixth Quartet in the mid-1950s, where the famously incongruous G major perfect cadence is a direct lift from Weinberg's Second.

Thursday 21 March, 19:30

Aria, Op. 9
Capriccio, Op. 11

In 1942, on either side of his First Symphony, Op. 10, Weinberg composed two short works for string quartet, coincidentally paralleling the Aria and Polka that had marked Shostakovich's string quartet debut ten years earlier. Weinberg's pieces are fresh compositions, however, rather than arrangements. It is not known for which players they might have been written, and the manuscripts carry no dedications or indications of first performance.

Played with mutes throughout, the beautiful Aria is a kind of Slavonic cousin to Fauré's famous song, 'Après un rêve', with its arcing melody over a gently pulsating accompaniment. This is a movement whose lyrical charm and formal perfection could easily make it an effective encore piece, rivalling in this respect the second movement of Weinberg's Seventh Quartet. That the composer retained a special affection for it is suggested by the fact that he reworked it multiple times: as the second movement of his orchestral Suite, Op. 26 (compiled in 1945), as one of Five Pieces for Flute and Piano (1947), and as one of his two Songs without Words for violin and piano (also 1947).

The Capriccio begins in the easygoing, serenade style of the first movement of Weinberg's Second Quartet, continuing with a relaxed waltz lilt and some deft metrical shifts between the basic 3/8 and sections in 5/8 and 5/16. It too was reused: in the Five Pieces for Flute and Piano, where it is placed centrally as the 'Second Dance'.

Quartet No. 3 in D minor, Op. 14

Presto – attacca
Andante sostenuto – attacca
Allegretto

The Third Quartet is in three large movements, played continuously. Quite distinct from the relaxed quality of its predecessor, its tone returns to the wiry intensity of the First Quartet, but this time with a greatly clarified harmonic language and more confident, assertive use of the instruments.

Structurally, each movement is adventurous in its own way. Several ideas compete for attention in the Presto first movement, while the tonal scheme is unpredictable and seemingly improvisatory. The Andante sostenuto slow movement, in 5/4 metre, tweaks the standard ABA form by means of a developing synthesis in its second A section. As if in compensation for both preceding movements, the finale is virtually monothematic and ebbs away rather beautifully. Such freedom of manoeuvre could still be seen as a vestigial sign of immaturity, and certainly Weinberg's structural focus would become clearer with his next quartet. All the same, one can imagine the D minor quartet seriously impressing Shostakovich at a time leading up to the latter's Third String Quartet three years later, even though no obvious thematic connections suggest themselves.

There is no record of a performance of the Third Quartet before that given in the Cosmo Rodewald Hall at the University of Manchester on 12 October 2007 by the Quatuor Danel. Nor was it published in Weinberg's lifetime, though the manuscript score does contain the conventional engravers' markings for system-division, suggesting that the publication process was at some stage under way. That Weinberg maintained a high regard for the work is suggested by the fact that he returned to it later in life, as he did the Second Quartet. In producing his Chamber Symphony No. 2, Op. 147 (1987) he added a new slow movement and sent the original one to the end of the finale.

Quartet No. 4 in E flat, Op. 20

Allegro commodo
Moderato assai
Largo marciale
Allegro moderato

Lasting approximately 35 minutes, the Fourth Quartet stands as testimony to Weinberg's compositional maturity and at the same time to the strong affinity he had discovered with Shostakovich. The first movement is in a broadly conceived sonata form with exposition repeat. The apparent straightforwardness of its character is relativised by a fairly swift metronome marking, by a second theme marked agitato, and by fast scale-patterns that adapt throughout the movement and constantly urge the music forwards.

An insistent Prokofievian toccata follows, implacably driven and phenomenally inventive in its textures. Its main themes are extensively quoted in Weinberg's Symphony No. 21, Op. 152 (1992), his last completed symphony, which he dedicated 'To those who Perished in the Warsaw Ghetto'. This raises the possibility of some special association of these musical ideas with the composer's Polish years, perhaps even with the music he had once played in his father's Jewish theatre, though any such relationship is not explicitly documented.

In the Largo marciale slow movement, funeral-march rhythms and stark solo lines anticipate Shostakovich more than they imitate him.

The initially unclouded arpeggio figurations of the finale are not all they seem, and they give way to a general loss of confidence that has to be rebuilt through struggle. As in Shostakovich's Second Quartet, composed one year previously, the music ultimately finds refuge in the tonic minor: not a common outcome for a work in the major mode, but an emotionally truthful one, sealed by a final crescendo gesture.

Friday 22 March, 13:00

Quartet No. 5 in B flat, Op. 27

Melody: Andante sostenuto.
Humoresque: Andantino
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Improvisation: Lento
Serenade: Moderato con moto

Weinberg's String Quartet No. 5 is his first to carry generic movement-titles, perhaps in response to Shostakovich titling the movements of his Second Quartet Overture, Recitative and Romance, Waltz, and Theme and Variations just a year earlier. Another innovation for Weinberg, and one that may actually have passed to Shostakovich rather than from him, is the comparative spareness of texture, especially in the opening Melody, in the Improvisation (whose first minute or so is given over entirely to the first violin) and in the Serenade (where the second violin is silent for the first 107 bars). Going beyond mere economy of means, this conscious withholding of forces would also become typical of Shostakovich, but not until the slow movement of his Fifth Quartet, composed some seven years later.

Melody – as opposed to dynamic physicality – is the premise for a large number of Weinberg's slow movements in all chamber media. In his Fifth Quartet, it lends a special restrained quality to the first movement. On the surface the remaining movements are as straightforward as their titles suggest, though their tendency towards internal disintegration increases as the work proceeds, and the final gesture is a perfect cadence made wistful by the searching quality of its preceding pages.

At the apex of the work is the Scherzo, which is a tour de force of driving energy. The most physically exciting of all Weinberg's compositions to date, it sounds

even more breathtaking in this original guise than in its reworking as part of his Chamber Symphony No. 3, Op. 151.

Another long solo for the first violin begins the Improvisation fourth movement, which is confessional in tone, especially when the first violin falls silent and the second violin sings with sobbing inflections.

Finally, the Serenade builds from an unassuming opening towards a frenetic Allegro furioso characterised by wiry contrapuntal intensifications. Following a masterfully controlled move away from the crisis-point the final gesture is a warm-sounding perfect cadence made wistful by the searching quality of its preceding pages. In this way each movement of the Fifth Quartet plays out a related symphonic drama, which becomes increasingly urgent as the work progresses. The premiere performance was given by the Beethoven String Quartet on 17 May 1947 in the Chamber Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire.

Improvisation and Romance

Among several of Weinberg's autograph manuscripts housed uniquely in the Glinka State Museum, rather than the Family Archive, is the unpretentious Improvisation and Romance for string quartet, composed in 1950, at a time when the 'anti-formalist' campaign was in full swing and public performances of new full-scale string quartets would have been hard to reconcile with official demands.

The Improvisation is a straightforward ABA Adagio, played with mutes and nicely sustained in its melodic unfolding, but nowhere near as individual as the Aria, Op. 9, whose mood it resembles. The Romance, marked as following attacca from the Improvisation, is in the style of Weinberg's collection of piano pieces, Children's Notebook, Op. 16. Its second verse transfers the thematic line to the second violin, taking the instrument perilously high for a piece of such otherwise modest demands.

The first performance was given by the Quatuor Danel in the St Charles Hall, Meggen (Lucerne) in June 2018.

Quartet No. 6, Op. 35

Allegro semplice
Presto agitato – attacca
Allegro con fuoco – attacca
Adagio
Moderato commodo
Andante maestoso

Composed in July and August 1946, the Sixth Quartet is laid out on a symphonic scale. The overall design of three fast movements, a slow fugue and two moderately paced concluding movements is as emancipated from traditional models as the structure of the individual movements, and the musical characters are both exploratory and flexible. The only precedents that come to mind for such freedom are in late Beethoven.

A faint whiff of klezmer – the Jewish folk-dance idiom – lends memorability to the Allegro semplice first movement. A compelling wildness whips up the central development section through manic glissandos towards an extended fff climax. This furious onrush is taken up again in the Presto agitato, while the immediately succeeding Allegro con fuoco predicts the instrumental theatre of later Shostakovich quartets in its startling extremes and brevity.

Weinberg's central Adagio, which also follows without a break, goes to the opposite extreme, with a quietly purposeful, orthodox fugal exposition, an intricate stretto, and an eventual recall of the declamations of the preceding Allegro con fuoco, punctuated by rhetorical outbursts and moments of catatonic stasis. This is followed by a leisurely paced Moderato commodo that keeps back some highly effective col legno Prokofievian tick-tock accompaniment figures for the later stages, before renewed passionate outbursts are eventually pacified in an ethereal conclusion. The final Andante maestoso develops an unstoppable momentum, as if determined to rectify the imbalances it has inherited from the rest of the work. However, even this movement has an episode of craziness towards the end, when trivial dance music intrudes on the prevailing serious business.

Overall this is a deeply unsettled, even experimental score, and it is not hard to see why it was not performed at the time of its composition. In 1948, in the aftermath of the notorious 'anti-formalism' campaign spearheaded by Andrey Zhdanov, it was even included on the list of works 'not recommended for performance'. Though the quartet was subsequently published, the performance given by the Quatuor Danel at the University of Manchester on 24 January 2007 is believed to have been the world premiere.

Quartet No. 7 in C, Op. 59

Adagio
Allegretto
Adagio – Allegro – Adagio

Up to Quartet No. 6, Weinberg's exploration of the genre had been marked by progressively expanding horizons. Symptomatic of this is the fact that No. 3 is in three movements, No. 4 in four, No. 5 in five and No. 6 in six. Then came the 1948 'anti-formalism' campaign and Weinberg's tailing by the secret police, followed by his imprisonment. It would be eleven years before he returned to the string quartet, under the less fraught conditions of the Khrushchev Thaw.

Weinberg's Seventh strikes out in new but more modest directions than before, speaking in tones of fragile intimacy. The three-movement work was composed January-March 1957 and dedicated to the Shostakovich-pupil Yury Levitin. Its first performance was given in the Chamber Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire on 22 December that year by the Borodin Quartet, who would go on to give premieres of Weinberg's Eighth, Ninth, Eleventh and Sixteenth Quartets.

The opening Adagio is reminiscent initially of Shostakovich's First String Quartet (1938), in that both works begin with a pure C major triad that repeatedly slips its moorings and is restored, each time by a longer and more tortuous route, the whole journey seemingly haunted by a sense of loss. Shortly after the return of the opening melody, to the accompaniment of chromatically intensified harmony, faster figurations are overlaid, with unmistakable shades of Jewish dance music, as if to hint more urgently at what it is that has been lost.

These wistful flurries are also heard in the second movement, where they once again serve to delay any easy return to the main theme and the tonic key, intensifying the search for consolation. This muted Allegretto is strongly klezmer-like in its textures, and the initially subdued, then declamatory, contrasting episode supplies memorable contrast. Not for nothing did this movement become a favourite encore piece for the Borodin Quartet, under the heading 'Nocturne'.

The finale begins with an Adagio introduction, which ruminates on ideas from both preceding movements. A large-scale Allegro ensues, laid out as a colossal series of 23 variations on a nervy viola theme, and becoming ever more intense towards the Schnittke-like chaos of the tenth variation. The following variations form an extended climax zone, after which the whole series is recalled in reverse order. In this quasi-palindromic design, the music is constantly recomposed - a creative tour de force of which Bartók or Berg would surely have been proud, but which Weinberg himself never again sought to accomplish.

Quartet No. 8 in C, Op. 66

Adagio – Poco andante – Adagio; Allegretto – Allegro; Adagio

Composed January-May 1959, the Eighth Quartet is dedicated to the Borodin Quartet, who gave the first performance on 13 November that year in the Chamber Hall of Moscow Conservatoire. Thanks to its wistful retrospective tone, structural concision and intensely memorable turns of phrase, it was for many years the best-known of Weinberg's quartets in the West.

The work is cast in a single movement with three subdivisions. The solemn opening Adagio has the feel of a slow introduction to a main first movement, which proves to be a Poco andante in a melancholy slow-march character. A moment of intense pathos arrives when the opening C major triad returns with sighing figures overlaid - a touching and memorable passage that Weinberg would return to late in life for key emotional moments in his Dostoyevsky opera The Idiot and in his last Symphony, No. 22. In due course the opening Adagio music also returns, to conclude this section in its initial mood of introspection.

A rondo-form Allegretto functions as a quasi-second movement, with a main theme subtly derived from the Poco andante and its klezmer intonations heightened in the counter-statement. This is followed by a yearning second theme that is then developed in a brusque 3/8 Allegro. At length Weinberg refers back to his 'first movement' Adagio, before a masterly third phase in which previous themes are blended, recombined and ultimately reconciled.

Quartet No. 9 in F sharp minor, Op. 80

Allegro molto – attacca
Allegretto – attacca
Andante – attacca
Allegro moderato

Whereas Shostakovich's Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Quartets had avoided the standard four-movement mould, and Weinberg himself had previously used it only in his First, Second and Fourth Quartets, in his Ninth Quartet (composed July-August 1963) he re-engaged powerfully with this classical model, merely directing that all four movements be played without a break.

The first movement is relentless in its rhythmic drive and boisterous contrapuntal energy. If Shostakovich's first movements had tended to become more tentative and provisional in tone, storing up tension for brutal scherzos and/or densely argued finales, Weinberg here produces a super-concentrated sonata structure, with both exposition and development/recapitulation sections repeated and the whole sustained at a continuous fortissimo. A brief coda feints to go yet again into the development/recapitulation cycle, then cuts off without explanation.

A shadowy waltz-scherzo follows, initially pizzicato but with a graceful contrasting arco theme, and with mutes added soon after the declamatory opening bars. Both ideas are characterized by a gentle melancholy, and their alternation, dovetailing, and exchange of characters is exquisitely crafted, right up to a conclusion marked by fragile harmonics.

Around the time of this Quartet, Shostakovich jested that he and Weinberg were engaged in a 'quartet competition', since they were neck-and-neck in terms of the number of quartets they had composed. The most striking affinity of all, evident in the texture of the opening bars of Weinberg's elegiac Andante third movement, is with the corresponding movement of the Tenth Quartet that Shostakovich would compose the year after Weinberg's Ninth and presumably in full knowledge of it.

Similarly, it is hard to imagine that the quizzical character of Shostakovich's Eleventh Quartet was not stimulated by the example of Weinberg's finale, with its stubborn repeated notes. Deployed in a more extended sonata structure, this intransigent gesture re-materialises from time to time, as if to negate the cheerfulness of the folk-dance contrasting theme. At length, all tensions are resolved in a coda that drives towards an optimistic F sharp major conclusion.

Like his previous two quartets, Weinberg's Ninth was premiered by the Borodin Quartet in the Chamber Hall of Moscow Conservatoire, their performance taking place on 27 March 1964.

Quartet No. 10 in A minor, Op. 85

Adagio – Allegro – Adagio – Allegretto

Weinberg's Tenth Quartet, composed July-August 1964, broadly follows the slow-fast-slow-fast layout of Shostakovich's Tenth, composed just before it. In terms of character, however, the music is very different. Where Shostakovich's first movement is flexible and searching, Weinberg's is solid and assertive, as if determined to draw strength from painful experience. In fact, the Quartet plays in one continuous span, even though the sections are almost as clearly defined as if they were separate movements.

The opening Adagio comes to rest in a mood of provisional resolution, hovering above, rather than fully in, its A minor tonality. The cello then ushers in a nervy, shadowy substitute scherzo, muted throughout (again in stark contrast to Shostakovich, whose second movement is a brutal Allegro furioso). Beneath the surface there seems to be an ethnically tinged dance – a characteristic mood for a number of Weinberg's inner movements and even finales. What emerges instead, after a notated pause, is a short-lived but passionate Adagio slow movement. Here the Quartet's opening idea is reworked in a declamatory arioso shared between first violin and cello, set in stark relief by towering chords in the accompanying instruments. This too departs from the Shostakovich model (a large-scale passacaglia) in that it soon falters, ultimately freezing into pizzicato chords for the second violin over a held D flat on the cello.

The first violin then transforms the measured trill that has been a seed-motif for the entire quartet into a gentle rocking idea. As it does so, the cello's D flat is renotated as C sharp, and Weinberg seems to be on course for a conventional major-mode finale. However, though this phase is complex enough in its unfolding, it declines the option of dark-to-light transformation or indeed of any obvious tying-up of loose ends. Instead, it tantalises the ear with a waltz that never fully materialises. Ultimately Weinberg works his way round to the same conclusion as his first movement, in the same kind of provisional mood but also

with a ring of discomfiting expressive truth. He was on the threshold of a late style that would prove as elliptical and inscrutable as that of his great friend and mentor.

Quartet No. 11 in F, Op. 89

Allegro assai
Allegretto
Adagio semplice
Allegro leggiero

Composed between October 1965 and December 1966, Weinberg's Eleventh Quartet is dedicated to his first daughter, Victoria. It was premiered by the Borodin Quartet on 13 April 1967 in the Chamber Hall of Moscow Conservatoire, and published along with the Tenth and Twelfth Quartets in 1971. The Eleventh departs drastically from the Tenth Quartet in being one of the most intimate and deceptively simple, not to say experimental, of all Weinberg's quartets. It is certainly one of the most transparently textured: two-and-a-half movements are played muted, and the slow movement – not muted – is largely solo.

The Allegro assai first movement opens in faux-naif mood, paraphrasing the pecking staccatos of Rameau's La poule (which Weinberg may have encountered as part of Ottorino Respighi's orchestral conflation known as Gli ucelli). After a repeat of the highly compact exposition, the development is of extraordinary length and intensity, as if releasing a conflictual urge that the exposition had kept at bay. The development and recapitulation (forlorn in character by comparison with the preceding build-up) are exquisitely dovetailed.

Weinberg discarded his first attempt at a second movement. Of what seems to have been a 17-page original – evidently an assertive Allegro moderato – only the first and last pages survive (numbered 24 and 40 in the autograph score). The recomposition, made a year after the completion of the Quartet, is a wispy, laconic muted scherzo-and-trio with coda. This Allegretto features bizarre contrasts of near-inaudible cluster-harmony chorales and violent pizzicato outbursts.

The cowering slow movement has something of the blank inscrutability of late Shostakovich. Here the pared-down textures invite the ear to fill the gaps and to probe beneath the surface. In conclusion, the Allegro leggiero finale works its way from an elusive F minor to a wan F major. This process leaves us for an apparently dangerous amount of time in a state of post-traumatic bemusement, before eventually coming out of its shell into an uneasy waltz, in which memories of the first movement's moods insinuate themselves. In this most elusive of Weinberg's quartets the ambivalent last page somehow reveals and yet conceals all.

Quartet No. 12, Op. 103

Largo
Allegretto
Presto
Moderato

The Twelfth Quartet was dedicated to Shostakovich's pupil and a mutual friend, Veniamin Basner. Composed between August 1969 and May 1970, its first performance took place on 14 April 1971, at the hands of the Quartet of the Moscow Chamber Orchestra in the Chamber Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire. It marks a watershed in Weinberg's chamber music in its incorporation of twelve-note elements, though these are by no means as clear as, for example, in Weinberg's Tenth Symphony, Op. 98 or his 24 Preludes for Solo Cello, Op. 100. In this respect he was following the example of Shostakovich's own Twelfth Quartet, composed in 1968.

The four-movement Twelfth Quartet begins lugubriously, with a Largo loosely based on a twelve-note collection. Its skilfully woven tissue of parts never rises from the initial ppp beyond piano, and the opening gesture pays homage to Bartók's Third Quartet - a sign of things to come in Weinberg's later quartets. The middle section is dominated by flurries of sextuplets, quintuplets and syncopated accompanimental rhythms; the opening material returns, only to vanish after a brief reminder of the middle section.

The musical material of the second movement, an Allegretto waltz-scherzo, is of a completely different character. The solo cello muses in its upper register, then

extends its thoughts to a chordal accompaniment from the other instruments. As the movement progresses, so Bartókian sonorities increasingly intrude (such as glissando within pizzicato, harmonics, and col legno), giving way to a lonely cello recitative of the kind Shostakovich was about to include in the slow movement of his Fifteenth Symphony.

A rhythmical and robust march-substitute Presto follows, unstoppable in character and virtuosic in its demands on the players. This soon develops an intransigent streak, and with the culminating unison for all instruments, Weinberg discovers what will become a signature gesture for his late quartets.

The concluding Moderato is perhaps the strangest movement of all. Above a regular bass motion from the cello, initially in 5/4 but soon in varied metres, we hear a characteristic rhythmic-melodic motif from the viola, initiating a quasi-fugato accumulation. The music strides onwards until we arrive at a section in 7/8, mysteriously sul tasto and punta d'arco. This is a mixture of canon and double fugue. A whole succession of further canons, in style very much like Bartók's Fourth Quartet, follows. A highly Shostakovichian duet between first violin and cello leads to a disconsolate review of thematic elements from various points in the movement, and at last comes a reprise of the 7/8 section, ending with a chord repeated 32 times, col legno, in an expressionless mezzo piano, like a worryingly repeated question mark.

Quartet No. 13, Op. 118

crotchet=58 – minim=100 – minim=92 – meno mosso – crotchet=63

After the Twelfth Quartet of 1969-70, there was another gap in Weinberg's quartet output, this time attributable in part to his work on large-scale projects such as four operas and three symphonies. As if to restore the balance, he then composed Quartets Nos. 13-16 in quick succession between 1977 and 1981. The Thirteenth Quartet is dedicated to the Borodin Quartet, but the honour of giving the premiere seems to belong to the Romantik Quartet, who performed it in Moscow on 6 November 1999 as part of a remarkable series of concerts to mark what would have been the composer's 80th birthday.

Like Shostakovich's Thirteenth Quartet, Weinberg's is in a single movement lasting some 14 or 15 minutes. Unlike Shostakovich's work, which traces an overall arch-shape, Weinberg's is not reducible to any single template. Composing his first quartet since the death of his friend in 1975, Weinberg adopted a complex blend of four-in-one design and overall sonata form, in which scherzo, slow movement and finale sections are only weakly articulated, the divisions being blurred by references back to the opening theme and by developmental recombinations of ideas. The overall emotional tenor is every bit as elusive as the structure, symbolised by the fact that this is the first of Weinberg's quartets to dispense with Italian tempo and character indications and to content itself with metronome markings.

The wandering first violin line in the opening bars harks back to Shostakovich's Eleventh Quartet. But as in the first movement of his own Seventh Quartet, Weinberg sustains the sinuous searching tone, rather than confronting it with Shostakovichian ironic contrast. The theme is passed between cello and first violin, in a becalmed, provisional 'first movement', and those same instruments lead off an anxious quasi-scherzo, dominated by spiky repeated notes and Weinberg's trademark oscillating perfect fourths. Gradually the lines coalesce onto pairs of instruments, over which the cello declaims an augmented version of

the main ‘first-movement’ theme, inaugurating the central developmental phase of the work.

As if to deny the structure a predictably symmetrical closure, Weinberg throws in a declamatory passage, initially in unison for all for instruments, marked grand détaché. This special indication, familiar to student string payers, features in a number of his late works; it denotes long, separated notes, particularly in unison passages. This idea in effect begins the ‘slow movement’. The unisons soon spread into Bartókian chromatic clusters, heralding a viola cadenza, fff but muted and accompanied by snarls that soon withdraw into sullenness. Ideas from the quasi-scherzo return, still within an intimidated mood. At length the sinuous ‘first-movement’ theme returns. But the last word is given to the chromatic clusters.

Quartet No. 14, Op. 122

crotchet=96 – attacca
crotchet=63 – attacca
crotchet=108 – attacca
dotted crotchet=54 – attacca
crotchet=152

Weinberg’s Fourteenth String Quartet was composed in 1978 and dedicated to the Shostakovich pupil, Yury Levitin. Its five movements run without a break but are starkly differentiated in thematic character. As in the quartets directly before and after, Weinberg avoids any indication of character or tempo other than metronome marks.

The first movement is built on two strongly contrasted ideas. Cello and first violin lead off with a stark, impassioned duet, notable for its hiatuses and silences as well as for its tightly knotted motifs, and the contrasting section features all four instruments more or less in rhythmic unison. Each idea is then intensified until a phase of close imitation, As in Quartet No. 13, a striking passage marked grand détaché, heralds a kind of synthesis. The movement is rounded off by abrupt chords.

Another passionately wide-ranging solo for the cello announces the slower second movement, and the viola's imitative entry leads us to expect a fugue. But Weinberg immediately veers away into chord progressions that seem to be searching for the safe haven of consonance. The best that can be achieved, however, is a becalmed brooding – as much to do with turning away from pain, perhaps, as with searching for comfort.

Similarly destined to ebb into despondency are the third and fourth movements. Both are muted throughout. Initially the third movement seems to herald one of Weinberg's ethnically tinged dance scherzos, with its scurrying paired semiquavers and vamp accompaniment. The movement eventually slinks away in a mixture of anxious reminiscences and bold proposals that have no firm ground on which to build.

In the fourth movement the viola seems to hold the clue to deflecting anxious wide-intervalled themes into something more lyrical and sane. Here too, however, the surrounding environment is uncooperative, and any progress made is strictly provisional.

It remains for the finale to embody a purposeful sense of construction. Initially the signs are positive. In between the rising triads of the second violin's broken-chord theme melodic cells grow and acquire harmonic support, while contrasting wispy staccato lines seem to harbour great potential. Eventually the mutes are removed and the cello's reminder of the first movement promises a summatory conclusion. Another grand détaché section decks out the main theme in bold colours. However, the music's destiny lies elsewhere: in unresolved thematic oppositions, tinged with fragile harmonics, and in a final inscrutable, white-note cadence.

The first performance was given by the Quatuor Danel in the Cosmo Rodewald Hall of the University of Manchester, on 26 January 2007.

Quartet No. 15, Op. 124

crotchet=69
crotchet=56
dotted crotchet=84
crotchet=112
crotchet=192
crotchet=176
crotchet=72
crotchet=80
crotchet=60

The Fifteenth, composed January-March 1979, is the most experimental of all Weinberg's quartets, certainly in terms of its nine-movement design. It is also the most elusive. As with Quartets Nos. 13 and 14, Weinberg confines his movement headings to metronome indications. The muted preludial first movement alternates a quiet G flat major chorale with shivery written-out trills. The mutes stay on for the even slower second movement, in which more trills alternate with brief repeated-note figures, most of which are passed from one single instrument to another. This is followed by a Bartókian exercise whose premise is pairs of instruments echoing ideas by inversion.

The mutes finally come off for a defiant sarabande fourth movement, which, amongst other things, challenges the players to realise quintuplet rhythms across one, two or even all three beats of the bar.

The defiant tone carries over into the fifth movement, which begins as a canon between the two violins at the upper, then lower minor second. The strictness of this canon is progressively broken down as the other instruments enter. The longest and fastest movement by far, this is in effect the first of five apparent attempts at a finale. Next comes a striding triple-time section that features the grand détaché writing so often used by Weinberg for the climactic phases of his late instrumental works.

The seventh movement is a brief passionate declamation for all four instruments, in five-four time. The eighth, in which mutes return, is a Bartókian study in pizzicato, against which melodies once again seek out a finale-style lyricism. In

conclusion, a sad, moderately paced last movement refuses to tie the threads together, despite vague hints at the work's opening tonality and theme.

The Fifteenth Quartet is dedicated to the Quartet of Yevgeniya Alikhanova, Valentina Alykova, Tatyana Kokhanovskaya and Marina Yanushevskaya, later known as the Moscow String Quartet when Yanushevskaya was replaced as cellist by Olga Ogranovich.

Quartet No. 16 in A flat minor, Op. 130

Allegro
Allegro – Andantino – Allegro
Lento
Moderato

Weinberg's Sixteenth Quartet was composed between 1 January and 15 February 1981. It carries a dedication to his sister Ester, who perished at the hands of the Nazis and who would have been 60 that year. The premiere was given by the Borodin Quartet on 8 November 1984 in the Chamber Hall of Moscow Conservatoire. The four movements follow the traditional layout but with the scherzo placed second; in each Weinberg makes intriguing and expressive diversions from the paths he leads the listener to expect.

The opening Allegro sets forth unaccompanied on the first violin, with a wiry, determined theme that is soon taken up by cello and viola. As the texture gradually becomes more intricate, the viola proposes a related, purposefully striding idea. A sudden pianissimo signals a transition (on first violin and cello alone) to a contrasting chordal theme. All these characters are submitted to intense cross-examination in the central phase, before a subtly recast recapitulation intervenes.

Weinberg's second movement is a remarkable take on the scherzo and trio archetype. The outer sections are an étude on oscillating fourths and scotch-snap rhythms, sparsely laid out and not unlike the inner movements of Bartók's later quartets in general feel. The texture breaks off for an even more enigmatic and Bartókian trio section in 7/8 time, with the instruments initially marked pianissisimo and sul tasto. This section contains a reworking of one Weinberg's pre-opus 1 Mazurkas, which were among the very few pieces he took with him on his flight from Warsaw. Presumably this was a piece Ester Weinberg would have heard her brother play.

The slow movement is severe and grave. It starts as though destined to grow into a passacaglia, with strictly rotating repetitions of the initially unaccompanied first violin theme. The cello's answering idea, easily missed, creeps in beneath the first entrance of the second violin and viola and is taken up by the first violin as the texture drops away. An intensely lyrical climax is briefly achieved before the movement crawls back into its shell.

Initially muted and with pizzicato accompaniment, the finale sets forth as an ethnically inflected dance. This time the main contrasting theme is hard to miss; it appears first on the viola in descending broken-chord figures against pizzicato double-stops. Towards the end the whole movement as it were congeals. Another dramatic contrast of dynamics ushers in a long quiet phase of scotch snaps and cadences, as if to correct the first movement's irresolution by means of an extended calm conclusion. Yet such an outcome would be neither emotional truthful nor structurally satisfying. Instead, the ghost of the first theme returns, and the work ends hauntingly on another only partially resolving cadence.

Quartet No. 17 in D, Op. 146

Allegro – Andantino – Lento – Allegro

Six years separate Weinberg's last two string quartets. In the interim he carried out the revisions of his first two quartets, giving them new opus numbers in view of the extent of their reworkings. That re-encounter may have prompted the initially carefree, youthful tone of his last essay in this medium, composed in October 1986, almost half a century after No. 1, and dedicated to the Borodin Quartet on its 40th anniversary (there is no evidence that they ever performed it).

Like the majority of Weinberg's instrumental works from the 1980s, the Quartet is liberally strewn with allusions to his earlier music. It plays without a break but falls into three (arguably four) more or less clearly-defined sections.

The opening of the sprightly D major Allegro balances a bright, energetic theme against one in the conventional dominant key that animates Weinberg's favourite chorale texture, borrowed from his song-cycle Lulling the Child, Op. 110, and also previously deployed in his Trio for Flute, Viola and Harp, Op. 127 and in the final act of his Gogol-based opera, The Portrait; it would have one final incarnation as the opening material for the Chamber Symphony No. 4.

The agitated development reworks ideas from the Andante of the Sonata No. 4 for Solo Cello, Op. 140. This is cut short, however, by a solo cello transition to the quasi-second movement, an Andantino that redeploys passages from the first movement of the same sonata. Violin and viola solos then frame an extended Lento, echoing Nastasya's 'birthday' aria from Act 1, Scene 1 of Weinberg's Dostoyevsky opera, the Idiot. Only a lack of strong thematic definition and the presence of ties to the material of the Andantino argue against considering this Lento as a section in its own right. At its conclusion, a balancing mini-cadenza for the viola leads into a restoration of the tempo of opening Allegro, along with familiar-sounding melodic fragments.

In the following reconstitution of the initial positive mood, the rhythmic playfulness from the 'first movement' development section reappears but with whispered dynamics, until the main theme finally re-emerges, followed by the animated-chorale subsidiary theme. At this point it becomes clear that this is, in effect, the opening Allegro's long-delayed recapitulation, in which ideas from the Lento and ultimately the Andantino are also reworked. In the course of this final

section the rather inconsequential, even self-dismissive quality of the opening theme is replaced by a wiry determination that betokens psychological as well as technical resourcefulness. In fact, little or nothing is predictable about this three- or four-in-one quasi-double-function sonata structure. Weinberg thus concludes his quartet cycle by leading us up the garden path, but towards the light rather than into Shostakovichian gloom.

Notes by David Fanning

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